

Message Text

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QUOTE: S E C R E T KINSHASA 2640

USIA FOR IAA, IOP

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PINS, AEMR, CG, AO

SUBJECT: SHABA INVASION: GENERAL ASSESSMENT (MARCH 22)

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH THE INVASION OF SHABA MAY STILL BE IN ITS INITIAL STAGE, SEVERAL TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS MAY BE DRAWN FROM EVENTS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS. MILITARILY, THE KATANGAN GENDARMES APPEAR CAPABLE OF CONTINUING TO EXPLOIT FAZ WEAKNESSES AND GRADUALLY ERODING MOBUTU'S FORCES. POLITICALLY, THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED THEIR ABILITY TO EXPLOIT THE WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION TO THE MOBUTU REGIME IN SHABA AND HAVE PROVIDED A FOCUS FOR THE CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS IN KINSHASA AND ELSEWHERE WHO WOULD WELCOME A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP. THE ECONOMIC DISRUPTION CAUSED BY THE INVASION HAS SO FAR BEEN MINOR BUT IF PROLONGED COULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES EVEN IF THE CONFLICT REMAINS CONFINED TO SHABA. THESE REALITIES SHOULD PROVE TO BE STRONG INDUCEMENT FOR MOBUTU TO RESORT TO DIPLOMACY AS HIS

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BEST ALTHOUGH UNCERTAIN MEANS OF PREVENTING THE CURRENT CRISIS FROM ENGULFING HIS REGIME. END SUMMARY.

2. MILITARY. THE KATANGANS, WHO WERE REPUTED TO BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE OF ALL AFRICAN MILITARY UNITS DURING THE ANGOLAN CONFLICT, HAVE THUS FAR DEMONSTRATED SUPERIORITY TO INITIALLY OUTNUMBERED FAZ TROOPS. THE ADDITIONAL FAZ UNITS DEPLOYED TO THE AREA OVER THE

PAST TWO WEEKS APPEAR TO HAVE HALTED THE KATANGANS' ADVANCE FOR THE MOMENT, BUT FAZ HAS YET TO BE REALLY TESTED OR TO PUSH THE INVADERS BACK. THE KATANGANS' STRATEGY IS NOT CLEAR AT THIS POINT: THE PRESENT LULL MAY SIMPLY MEAN THEY ARE CONSOLIDATING DEFENSES AGAINST A POSSIBLE FAZ COUNTERATTACK; OR THEY MAY BE PREPARING TO RENEW THEIR PRESSURE ON KOLWEZI IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THEY MAY TRY TO OPEN ADDITIONAL FRONTS OUTSIDE SHABA, WITH ONE LOGICAL TARGET BEING THE AREA AROUND TSHIKAPA WHICH IS NEAR THE ANGOLAN HEADQUARTERS OF KATANGAN LEADER MBUMBA AND IS POPULATED BY THE TSHOKWE, WHO WITH THE LUNDA PROVIDE THE ETHNIC BASE OF SUPPORT FOR THE GENDARMES.

3. DESPITE RECURRENT REPORTS OF IMPENDING ATTACKS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT ELSEWHERE IN ZAIRE, NOTHING HAS YET MATERIALIZED. POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME AREAS INCLUDE THE PRP REBEL SANCTUARY AREA IN EASTERN ZAIRE, BANDUNDU REGION (WHERE VOCAL SUPPORT FOR THE INVADERS IS REPORTEDLY WIDESPREAD), AND EVER-VULNERABLE BAS-ZAIRE. WE ALSO NOTE ADDITIONAL ACCUSATIONS BY LUANDA OF ZAIRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN CROSS-BORDER RAIDS INTO CABINDA AND NORTHERN ANGOLA, WHICH COULD PROVIDE A PRETEXT FOR RETALIATORY STRIKES.

4. FAZ, FOR ITS PART, HAS UTILIZED THE TIME SINCE THE INVASION BEGAN TO MOVE SIZEABLE FORCES INTO SHABA AREA, FOCUSING ON THE DEFENSE OF THE KOLWEZI COPPER COMPLEX AND KAMINA BASE. WHILE FAZ'S INABILITY TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE AFTER TWO WEEKS REFLECTS ITS WEAKNESS, THE GOZ CAN AT LEAST CLAIM THAT IT HAS NOT YET YIELDED ANY IMPORTANT INDUSTRIAL, MILITARY OR POPULATION CENTERS.

5. POLITICAL. THAT THE INVADERS HAVE BEEN WELCOMED BY THEIR
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TRIBAL BROTHERS IN THE LUNDA-TSHOKWE AREAS ALONG SHABA'S BORDER WITH ANGOLA IS NOT SURPRISING. THEIR ABILITY TO ELICIT SYMPATHY RATHER THAN FEAR FROM SHABA'S LUBA POPULATION, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS STRIKING TESTIMONY TO THEIR POLITICAL SKILL IN CTNTRAST TO THAT OF FAZ, WHICH IS ALL TOO OFTEN VIEWED WITH HOSTILITY BY THE CIVILIAN POPULATION. THE INVASION HAS ALSO SERVED TO CRYSTALLIZE THE DIFFUSE HOPES FOR CHANGE HELD BY MEMBERS OF KINSHASA'S POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE WHO BELIEVE THAT RESOLUTION OF ZAIRE'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS REQUIRES MOBUTU'S REMOVAL FROM POBTR. THEY ARE VAGUE, HOWEVER, WHEN IT COMES TO SPECIFYING WHO MIGHT DO ANY BETTER. FAR FROM ASSERTING FORCEFUL PERSONAL LEADERSHIP IN CONFRONTING THE INVASION, MOBUTU HAS APPEARED HESITANT TO GO TOO FAR IN CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY AND APPEALING FOR ALL-OUT SUPPORT BY THE POPULACE. THIS HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPRESSION WHICH MANY SEEM TO HAVE THAT HE IS LOSING HIS GRIP, A BELIEF LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE MORE OUTSPOKEN CRITICISM AND PERHAPS BOLDER ACTION BY HIS OPPONENTS. ON THE OTHER HAND, REPORTED EFFORTS BY THE VARIOUS DISSIDENT AND EXILE OPPOSITION GROUPS TO GET TOGETHER AND COORDINATE THEIR ACTIONS DO NOT YET SEEM TO HAVE

SUCCEEDED. NOR DO WE HAVE EVIDENCE THAT LOYALTY TO MOBUTU AMONG FAZ OFFICERS HAS DECLINED, ALTHOUGH THIS COULD CHANGE QUICKLY IF THE ARMY SUFFERS MAJOR REVERSES IN SHABA OR IF ECONOMIC DISRUPTION SHOULD BECOME SERIOUS.

6. ECONOMIC. THE SHABA INVASION HAS SO FAR CAUSED NEGLIGIBLE DISLOCATION OF ZAIRE'S ECONOMY, ALTHOUGH A PROLONGATION OF THE INSURGENCY AT EVEN ITS PRESENT LEVEL IS BOUND TO PRODUCE INCREASING STRAINS. WHILE COPPER PRODUCTION HAS NOT YET BEEN SERIOUSLY AFFECTED, A SUCCESSFUL ATTACK ON KOLWEZI, THE CENTER OF GECAMINE'S OPERATIONS, WOULD OF COURSE HAVE A CRIPPLING IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY AND, POLITICALLY, PLACE THE KATANGANS IN A MOST ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION IN DEALING WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

7. DIPLOMATIC. THE MILITARY STALEMATE HAS GIVEN THE GOZ TIME TO MANEUVER ON THE DIPLOMATIC SCENE. AT FIRST SLOW OFF THE MARK, THE GOZ'S POLITICAL EFFORTS HAVE RECENTLY GAINED MOMENTUM WITH
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PRIMARY FOCUS ON WINNING AFRICAN SUPPORT FOR ITS CASE. WHILE RESULTS HAVE BEEN MIXED SO FAR, ZAIRE DOES SEEM TO HAVE MADE HEADWAY ON THE ISSUE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND IN ENLISTING THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF SEVERAL KEY STATES, NOTABLY NIGERIA, WITH A VIEW TO POSSIBLE MEDIATION. MOBUTU, A MILITARY MAN, PROBABLY HAS LIMITED FAITH IN THE NEGOTIATION OPTION, AND WILL IN ANY CASE DO ALL POSSIBLE TO STRENGTHEN HIS POLITICAL POSITION VIS-A-VIS ANGOLA BY EXTRACTING MATERIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE WEST AND ALSO BY DOING WHAT HE CAN ON THE GROUND. BUT HIS RELATIVE MILITARY WEAKNESS AND HIS INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL VULNERABILITIES MAY ULTIMATELY PROVE TO BE DECISIVE FACTORS IN IMPELLING HIM TO SERIOUSLY SEEK A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION. THE KEY QUESTION WILL THEN BE WHETHER ANGOLA AND ITS SUPPORTERS WILL RESPOND.

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